

THE SOVIET POSITION ON THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE

From 28 April 1947 to 29 November 1948 the United Nations considered the question of Palestine. In the light of the present Soviet attitude, which is violently anti-Israel, it is interesting to examine United Nations records on the subject of the partition of Palestine to learn what the attitude of the Soviet Union was at that time.

It will be seen very quickly that the Soviet policy at that time was just as strongly anti-Arab as it now favors the viewpoint of the Arab States. One of the leading spokesmen of the Soviet Union in the United Nations was Andrei Gromyko, now Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is no exaggeration to state now that, as the record shows, had the Soviet Union then favored the Arab viewpoint, the present situation would not have arisen. For example, the Arab States wanted the Assembly to pass a resolution favoring the creation of an independent unitary state in Palestine, to succeed the British Mandate. Both the United Kingdom and the United States supported the Arabs in this motion. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was strenuously opposed, preferring the establishment of its Partition Plan, by means of which the state of Israel came into existence.

The records of the United Nations show that the Soviet Union, which throughout the sessions championed its ideas with unwavering fervor, was responsible for:

- (1) passage of the Partition Plan;
- (2) persistent opposition to, and indeed defeat of, various Arab States' proposals on the Palestine question;
- (3) defeat of the United States proposal to create a temporary trusteeship;
- (4) obstruction to, and eventual defeat of, the creation of a unitary state, as urged by the Arabs.

As may be seen in the same records, in all the maneuvers of the Soviet Union, a leading part was taken by Andrei Gromyko. The fact that the policy of the Soviet Union, which Gromyko, as Minister for Foreign Affairs represents, is now the exact opposite of what it was at the time the United Nations decided in

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favor of partition leads naturally to the question: What will be the policy of the Soviet Union, and of its spokesman, Gromyko, a few years hence?

For example, on 29 April 1947, Mahmoud Hassan Pasha, head of the Egyptian delegation, proposed that the First Special Session of the General Assembly consider a motion on: "The termination of the Mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence."

The Soviet Bloc did not attack this motion directly. Instead, they attacked from the flank, asserting that no such action could be entertained prior to hearing the Jewish point of view. Speaking for the Soviet Union, Mr. Gromyko said on 30 April 1947: 1/

The representatives of the Arab States have said that they do not insist on a vote on their proposal at this meeting. Thus, it seems to me that we have no reason at present to vote on this proposal for it is as if this proposal did not, as it were, exist at the present meeting.

I think this is the only explanation which corresponds to the situation which has arisen. If this is so, I would ask the representatives of the Arab delegations and the representative of Egypt in particular, to give a definite reply. I consider that the proposal cannot be put to a vote at the present moment and that it does not, as it were, exist at this stage.

Of course, I reserve the right to define my position in regard to the vote when this proposal is discussed again and in the place where it is discussed.

On a motion of the Polish delegate, amended by the representative of Czechoslovakia, it was suggested that the Assembly: 2/

Decides to invite the representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to appear before the plenary meeting of the General Assembly for the purpose of expressing their views on this question.

The Arab States objected to having Jewish organizations appear before the plenary meetings of the United Nations or before any of its main committees on the grounds that according to the United Nations Charter only representatives of states are allowed to appear before the United Nations General Assembly. However, they did not object to such organizations appearing before sub-committees. 3/

However, Mr. Gromyko took a precisely opposite view. He said on 2 May: 4/

When I speak of inviting the representatives of the Jewish organizations, I have in mind primarily an invitation to these representatives to attend the General Assembly, that is, the plenary meetings. The Soviet delegation does not accept the point of view that the representatives of the Jewish organizations can be permitted to be present, let us say, at the First Committee, but at the same time cannot be permitted to attend the General Assembly's plenary meetings where they would be given an opportunity of expressing their views on this question. Such a half-hearted decision would be especially unjust from the point of view of the Jewish population in Palestine, which is vitally concerned in this matter.

And, again, Mr. Gromyko stated on the same day: 5/

We heard the statement of the representative of the United States of America, Senator Austin. He submitted a resolution to us which not only makes no provision for inviting the Jewish organizations to the General Assembly's plenary meetings but does not provide for inviting representatives of the Jewish organizations at all. The resolution merely states that statements and documents received from Jewish and other organizations should be transmitted to the appropriate committee of the General Assembly. The transmission of documents to the appropriate committee is practically a technical operation. Apart from this, delegations have received at least the main statements of organizations which have made requests. Therefore, the solution offered by the resolution does not get us much further; it does not constitute the slightest progress in any way.

The Arab States were clearly hoping that the General Assembly would vote for the creation of a unitary state; such a vote would serve their efforts to keep Palestine undivided. But from the outset the Soviet Bloc insisted on the Jews' right to Palestine. Soviet Bloc delegates expressed their view that, under prevailing conditions, it would be impossible to get Arabs and Jews to live peaceably together in a single unitary state. 6/

Similarly, the Arab States, throughout the deliberations, warned that partition would create an unending problem and a wave

of anti-Semitism which would harm Jewish populations everywhere. But the Communists, on the other hand, argued that the Jews were entitled to part of Palestine, that partition was the only possible solution to Arab-Jewish strife, and that Palestine was large enough to absorb large numbers of Jewish refugees.

Mr. Gromyko said on 26 November 1947: 7/

The representatives of the Arab States claim that the partition of Palestine would be an historic injustice. But this view of the case is unacceptable, if only because, after all, the Jewish people has been closely linked with Palestine for a considerable period of history.

And again Mr. Gromyko asserted on 20 April 1948: 8/

...it was clear that the United States was preparing to deal a mortal blow to the partition decision and to present a new plan for Palestine. It was claimed that the new plan was better, although in reality the contrary was true....

He also said: 9/

The trusteeship plan proposed by the United States was likely to lead to an intensification of the struggle in Palestine; it would create a threat to peace and would increase anxiety in the Near East. Moreover, trusteeship in Palestine was not compatible with the present cultural and political level of either Jews or Arabs. Such a plan was inconsistent with the right to self-determination of the peoples of Palestine and would place that country in a state of virtual colonial slavery, with all the deplorable consequences of such a state.

And, a few days later, (on 28 April) Mr. Gromyko said: 10/

The Arabs had indicated their equivocal position and it was unlikely that they would make it any clearer in the sub-committee. The lack of clarity was part of their tactics. The Jewish Agency had rejected the idea of trusteeship and was unlikely to reverse itself in the sub-committee.

He also maintained that: 11/

The USSR delegation would therefore vote against the new United States proposal for the establishment of trusteeship in Palestine.

....

The USSR delegation considered that the decision on the partition of Palestine was a just decision and that the United Nations should take effective measures to ensure its implementation.

It is clear from these documents that the Soviet Union was determined that, if it could, it would achieve the partition of Palestine. What the Soviet motives were is a matter of conjecture, just as today their vigorous partisanship of the Arab cause is a matter of conjecture. The only certainty is that they are as unlikely to be consistent in this partisanship in the future as they have been in the past. When it suits the Soviet Union to change a policy, even overnight, they will do so without any hesitation.

SOURCES

1. Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Vol. II, General Committee, Verbatim Records of Meetings, pp. 79-80, 29 Apr-7 May 1947.
2. Ibid., (taken from Document A/BUR/80) 29 Apr-7 May 1947.
3. Ibid., pp. 114-116.
4. Ibid., p. 110.
5. Ibid., p. 113.
6. Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestine Question, Summary Records of Meetings, pp. 10-11, 25, 31, 31, 48, 69, 90, 95, 184, 25 Sep-25 Nov 1947.
7. Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record, pp. 1359-63, 16 Sep-27 Nov 1947.
8. Official Records of the Second Special Session of the General Assembly, Vol. II, Main Committee, Summary Records of Meetings, pp. 17-18, 16 Apr-14 May 1948.
9. Ibid., p. 19.
10. Ibid., p. 136.
11. Ibid., pp. 17, 20.